



Save Our Water, Inc.

Water-related recreation and tourism create a powerful economic engine for the cities, towns and rural communities surrounding Lake Eufaula. The need to guard this regional economic lynch-pin was a driving force in the creation of Save Our Water, Inc. (SOW) and our sister organization, Team Up to Clean Up (TUCU).

What we do

As a grassroots citizens' group organized to protect and preserve Lake Eufaula's environment, economy and ecosystem, Save Our Water identifies and recommends management strategies and programs that will balance all authorized uses of the Lake; to that end, we strive to inform and educate lake area residents and elected officials, not only about those uses, but also about impediments and threats to those uses. Over the last decade, we have chiefly emphasized protecting Lake Eufaula's recreational use and water quality.

Recreation

SOW members often point to the annual U.S. Travel Association report, The Economic Impact of Travel on Oklahoma Counties, which shows tourism to be the third largest industry in Oklahoma; domestic travelers directly spent \$8.9 billion in Oklahoma during 2014, representing a 20 percent increase in travel-related spending since 2012. Much of that tourism happens on or around Oklahoma's lakes, rivers and streams. More helpful to understanding tourism and recreation as it relates to Lake Eufaula and other Corps lakes, however, are reports from U.S. Fish and Wildlife, National Park Services, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, the Outdoor Industry of America, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and regional entities like the Lake Eufaula Association; additionally, academic research on the economic impact of non-consumptive water activities, such as those studies produced by Oklahoma State University, is available. Save Our Water has many of these reports, and can provide them to any LEAC member upon request.

What all these reports highlight is that travel is on the rise. Nationwide, the travel sector added more than 800,000 jobs since the Great Recession that began in 2007, recovering and adding more jobs than the U.S. manufacturing sector. And for more than 60 years, outdoor recreation reports, including those from the National Recreation and Parks Association, have emphasized that water is the number one recreation attraction in America. Water sports—whether swimming, boating, fishing, skiing, canoeing or rafting—are high on the list of the country's top ten recreation activities.



Lake Eufaula is one of Oklahoma's most popular lakes. According to the USACE's "Value to the Nation" website, Lake Eufaula attracted 2.47 million visits in 2012. Visitors participated in activities such as fishing and fishing tournaments, boating, swimming, hunting, waterskiing, wake-boarding, picnicking, wildlife-watching, hiking and camping. And those visits annually generate approximately \$79 million in expenditures and support 823 jobs within 30 miles of Lake Eufaula, (Infographic, page 3) reaching out to encompass and help sustain scores of businesses and industries. (Infographic, page 4)

Real Estate

The value of Lake Eufaula's recreational waters extends far beyond what normally comes to mind. Often not properly captured in lake area economic studies, Lake Eufaula homes and vacation rentals comprise a substantial indirect economic benefit related to recreational waters. A water-front or water-view home on Lake Eufaula is typically valued at \$150-\$185 per square foot. That same home located elsewhere in Oklahoma, lacking proximity to water, would have a value of \$85-\$100 per square foot. Increased property values translate directly into increased property taxes, which benefit mostly rural school districts. Because many of these lake homes are vacation or retirement homes, they bring additional funding via property taxes to school districts without adding students to those districts.



Additionally, water-related real estate development creates jobs and sales through expanding home construction that might not otherwise occur in chiefly rural areas. These mini-housing booms lead to increased demand for building materials and services, lot and construction loans, mortgage loans, private dock building services and more; owners become new utilities customers, purchase furnishings and appliances for their homes along with watercraft, fishing equipment and all-terrain vehicles for play. Spending translates to the expansion of existing or opening of new businesses, resulting in more new jobs and more new dollars circulating through our lake communities.

It is this thriving lake economy—so critical to the health of southeast Oklahoma’s economy—that SOW works to protect. From battling attempts to permit and move large quantities of water out of the watershed to pushing for bottom-up Regional Water

Planning in the state legislature, from driving public input for the recently updated shoreline management plan to helping improve Oklahoma’s water statutes, Save Our Water has long been Lake Eufaula’s chief advocate. In that arena, our greatest accomplishment has been playing a crucial role in the establishment of the Lake Eufaula Advisory Committee (LEAC).

Water Quality

SOW, under the leadership of TUCU, helps protect Lake Eufaula’s water quality, and in this area both organizations move beyond advocacy; here, we are “boots on the ground,” ensuring that recreational waters are safe and clean.

In less than 10 years, TUCU and SOW raised hundreds of thousands of dollars in private donations of cash, in-kind services and local volunteer hours—all for the benefit of Lake Eufaula and its surrounding communities. Our volunteers (ranging from young school children to senior citizens) take responsibility for picking up litter along shorelines, creating programs to keep trash out of the lake, organizing free dump days, working with DEQ, ODOT and local law enforcement to enforce signage and litter laws and educating the public about litter. We have removed and recycled or disposed of more than 1,000 tons of solid waste, 7,000 tires, 180 cubic yards of polystyrene, 120 tons of metal and 450 batteries—all directly from or around the lake.

We are currently working with an ecological restoration specialist and the City of Eufaula to develop a wetlands restoration demonstration project in Eufaula Cove. With this project, we hope to both educate the public about the value of wetlands and mitigate the effects of non-point source pollution in the lake.

What we hope to accomplish as part of the LEAC

The duties of this committee include “providing information and recommendations to the Corps of Engineers regarding operations” of Lake Eufaula for project purposes, and providing recommendations on a reallocation study or a pool or lake-level management plan. Lake Eufaula’s vital recreational economy depends on recognizing and protecting non-consumptive water use; Lake Eufaula’s recreation, water supply and fish and wildlife sectors all depend on safe-guarding and improving water quality. The primary goal of Save Our Water, with regards to the LEAC, is to help identify and recommend a pool management plan that protects both the water quality and the recreational use of Lake Eufaula while at the same time balancing the needs of all authorized uses of the lake.



Economic Impact of Lake Eufaula



27,625
visits by
Hunters



179,371
visits by
Picnickers



752,178
visits by
Sightseers



899,300
visits by
Anglers



2012 economic data shows Lake Eufaula attracts **2.47 million** visits per year.

Those visits annually generate almost **\$79 million** in expenditures

& support **823 jobs** within 30 miles of the lake.



146,399
Other visit
types



340,080
visits by
Boaters



686,530
visits by
Swimmers



175,232
visits by
Water Skiers



52,174
visits by
Campers



Fun at the Lake

- Fishing Tournaments
- Golf Tournaments
- Rest & Relaxation
- Family Vacations
- Equestrian Trips
- Charity events
- Water Skiing
- Swimming
- Poker Runs
- Weddings
- Reunions
- Fishing
- Hiking
- Golfing
- Boating
- Retreats
- Concerts
- Bicycling
- Banquets
- Camping trips
- Tribal Gatherings
- Wildlife watching
- Company meetings
- Environmental Studies
- Church & Youth Camps
- Retirement Destinations
- Local & Regional Festivals

